

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

CK-H-60

✓ 3007 10

1. Name of Site:

Common Cahners Publishing Co.  
Historic Kimball House

2. Location:

Street and Number 1801 S. Prairie Ave.  
City or Town Chicago  
County Cook  
Zip Code  
Township  
Range  
Section  
1/4 Section

3. Classification:

Category (check one) Integrity (check one)  
 District  Building  Altered  Unaltered  
 Site  Structure  Moved  Original Site

4. Ownership:

Private  Public  
 Occupied  Unoccupied  
 Preservation work in progress

Status (check one)

Access to Public

Yes  Restricted  Unrestricted  No

Present Use (check one or more)

Agricultural  Industrial  Religious  
 Commercial  Military  Scientific  
 Educational  Museum  Transportation  
 Entertainment  Park  Other  
 Government  Private Residence

5. Ownership of Property:

Owner's Name Cahners Publ. Co. Phone Number

Street and Number

City or Town

State

County

Zip Code

6. Description: Chateanesque

Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated  
 Ruins  Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway?  Yes  No

ARCHITECTURE

7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Site         | (Pre-Columbian)          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archeological Site         | (Post-Columbian to 1673) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French Influence           | (1673-1780)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Frontier          | (1780-1818)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Early             | (1818-1850)              |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Illinois Middle | (1850-1900)              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illinois Late              | (1900-present)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Famous People              | (give names & dates)     |

8. Specific Date: 1890-92

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (historic)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal (pre-historic) | <input type="checkbox"/> Military            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture               | <input type="checkbox"/> Music               |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication             | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation              | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry       | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture    |  |

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates) Residence designed  
Use additional sheets if necessary. for Kimball, the piano mfs. by Solon S.  
Beman. Nat'l Register - included in the Prairie Ave. Historical District

9. Form prepared by:

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 6/23/75  
Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street and Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

Robertson, Robert, Of Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.  
National Register material

111  
1115



- Survey Track
- Archaeology
- Architecture
- History

200540

1. Name of Site:

Cahners

Cahners Publishing Company, Inc.

Historic:

William W. Kimball House

2. Location of site:

Street and Number

1801 South Prairie Avenue

City or Town

Chicago

Zip Code

60616

Township

Range

Section

1/4 Section

County

Cook

3. Classification

Category: (check one)

District

Site

Building

Structure

Integrity: (check one)

Altered Inter.

Position: (check one)

Moved

Unaltered Ext.

Original Site

4. Ownership:

Public

Private

Status:

Occupied

Unoccupied

Preservation

work in progress

Access to the public:

Yes

Restricted

Unrestricted

No

Present Use: (check one or more)

Agricultural

Commercial

Educational

Entertainment

Government

Industrial

Military

Museum

Park

Private residence

Religious

Scientific

Transportation

Other (specify)

5. Owner of property:

Owner's name

Cahners Publishing Company, Inc.

Phone number

Street and number

1801 South Prairie Avenue

City or town

Chicago

State

Illinois

County

Cook

Zip Code

60616



### Description:

The three-story Kimball House has a majestic exterior of Bedford limestone, sheathing a wood frame. Footings are of limestone, supporting a basement and three stories. Topping the building is a steep slate roof crowned with an ornamental iron-railed gallery.

Throughout the years, the "Chateausque" facades have not been altered. As is characteristic of the 16th Century "Francis I" style, today often referred to as "Chateausque", the house is topped by a complex mass of steeply sloping roof shapes--hipped, gabled, conical--punctuated with dormer windows; balustrades; tall, slender chimneys with molded designs, and a myriad of finials. Windows on every story and on all four facades are of various shapes and sizes: curved and flat, arched and rectangular, large and small. In every window, stone mullions and transoms separate the panes of glass.

Although the general shape of the house is rectangular, its massing, like the roofline, is irregular, made up of numerous projections. Windowed walls extend beyond the plans of the building as do other smaller architectural elements; string courses, brackets, balustrades, and pilasters with heavily ornamented Composite capitals.

The main facade, on Prairie Avenue, is dominated by a broad, elliptical bow window, reaching from the ground to the roofline. Centered above the cornice that tops the bow window is a large divided window flanked by ornamented pilasters and capped by a steep gable lavishly decorated in foliate bas-relief ornament and flanked by finials. The curved sides of the bow window are topped, above the cornice, by a filigreed balustrade that forms a sort of balcony in front of the windows in the sides of the dormer projection.

It is said that the interior once contained 29 rooms. Today, although many rooms have been subdivided, the building's character has not been altered appreciably. The main rooms--entrance hall, parlors, and dining room--are still richly paneled in oak and mahogany. Ceilings are beamed. The original onyx fireplace remain. The intricately carved balustrades of the main staircase are in place. Throughout the interior, as well as the exterior of the mansion, the dignity that once prevailed on Prairie Avenue remains intact.

### Significance:

In his Old Chicago Houses, published in 1941, John Drury cited the Kimball House as Chicago's finest example of the French Chateau style of architecture. Indeed, its significance as typifying this style is recognized nationally today. Marcus Whiffen, architectural historian and author of American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles, includes a photograph of the Kimball House among the illustrations he gives of the "Chateauseque" style.

The "Chateausque" style, according to Whiffen, is characterized by masonry construction, assymetrical plans, and silhouettes with high steep-sided hipped roofs rising to a ridge or a flat top. These roofs are surmounted by metal railings or openwork metal cresting. Dormer windows with pinnacled gables are universal to the style. In the Kimball House, these characteristics are epitomized.

Solon S. Beman, architect of the Kimball House, was brought to Chicago from New York in 1879 by George Pullman. Chiefly noted for designing the village of Pullman, said to be America's first planned industrial town, Beman is also known for having designed Chicago's Studebaker (now Fine Arts) Building and Grand Central Station, in addition to the Kimball House.

Significance, cont.

William W. Kimball, who commissioned Beman to design his house, was the founder of a piano and organ manufacturing company that was to become one of the city's leading firms. According to Chicago and its Makers, Kimball was one of the city's best-loved citizens. He was also one of its wealthiest and is said to have spent a million dollars on his mansion.

Built on Prairie Avenue, which an Old Chicago saying quoted by Arthur Meeker in his novel Prairie Avenue described as "the sunny street that holds the sifted few," the Kimball home stood near those of Marshall Field, Philip Armour, Pullman, and John J. Glessner. With the Glessner House, designed by H. H. Richardson in 1886 and designated an official "Chicago Landmark" in 1970, the Kimball House is practically the last remaining evidence of Prairie Avenue's high point as Chicago's foremost residential street during the 1880's and 1890's.

With the exception of the Glessner House, the mansions on Prairie Avenue followed the vogue of the day and were built in styles derived from architecture of the past. The Kimball House was no exception. Patterned by Beman after the Chateau de Jesselin, in the French province of Brittany, it is significant today because it portrays a way of life long since gone from the Chicago--and American--scene.

The house is further distinctive because it stands in the immediate vicinity of an event important in Chicago history--the Fort Dearborn Massacre. It was near what is today 18th Street and Prairie Avenue that these men, women, and children fleeing the Fort during the War of 1812 were slaughtered. A statue which formerly marked the spot is now housed in the Chicago Historical Society, while a plaque commemorating the tragedy is affixed to the building at the northeast corner of the intersection, across from the Kimball House.

Bibliographical References:

Bach, Ira. Chicago on Foot. Fellett Publishing Company, 1969, p. 130.

Drury, John. Old Chicago Houses. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941. pp. 49-53.

Gilbert, Paul, and Bryson, Charles Lee. Chicago and its Makers. Chicago: Felix Mendelsohn, Publisher, 1929. pp. 180, 653.

Meeker, Arthur. Prairie Avenue. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949.

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1969. pp. 141-2, 145.